

# Digital TV Switch Delayed

*Congress is giving broadcasters until June 12 to make the switch from analog to digital TV.*

✖ **Feb. 10, 2009** – Congress is giving broadcasters and American families an extra four months to make the switch from analog to digital TV, pushing this year's original mandated transition date back from Feb. 17 to June 12.

"Many Christian television station owners are very mixed about the delay," said Bob Powers, vice president of government relations for National Religious Broadcasters (NRB), which did not take an official position on the delay. "But as with all broadcasters, we want to ensure that there are as many eyes on our television programs as possible, especially when sharing the gospel. So a delay may only help in assuring that more consumers are truly prepared."

Powers said the DTV Delay Act is a voluntary delay. TV stations will still be permitted to switch to digital on Feb. 17, but each viewing area could be different. "I think the trend will be that local stations band together. If one makes the change on Feb 17, they all will, or vice versa," he said.

He also said its cost-prohibitive for stations to continue broadcasting two signals for four more months. "Many of these stations also have been promoting heavily the Feb. 17 date, and feel that they've been diligent in letting their viewers know," he said.

Congress passed the DTV Delay Act partly as a response to public confusion over what the transition to digital TV entails.

Last year, the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) began making the public aware of the coming transition to digital, because millions of TV's in the U.S. come equipped to only

receive analog signals.

To help with the transition, the Department of Commerce's National Telecommunications and Information Administration (NTIA) launched its **TV Converter Box Coupon Program**, a limited supply of **government-subsidized \$40 coupons** that helped families pay for digital-to-analog converter boxes.

Each family was limited to two coupons, but by the end of 2008, all funding for the coupon program was exhausted, and tens of thousands of people are now on a government waiting list, hoping federal funding will resume before the new June 12 deadline.

Most new television sets don't risk losing reception since they come equipped with built-in digital tuners. Customers receiving television by cable, satellite or a telephone company, are also not affected by the transition.

According to the NTIA, there are basically four ways for households to convert to digital television: subscribe to cable TV; subscribe to satellite TV; buy a new digital-ready TV; or buy a digital converter box, which costs between \$40 and \$80.

Advocates for digital TV have said higher quality images and sound exist through digital. But Powers said with a digital signal, there's always a concern for folks in the nation's most rural locations. "A digital signal has a 'cliff,' either you get the signal or you don't," he said. "So even though a person might do all the right set up for their new converter box, it is possible that on either Feb. 17 or June 12, that they are not able to get a signal."

Another reason the government wants to switch over has to do with the airwave spectrum, which allows digital signals to broadcast multiple programs over the same bandwidth – known as multiplexing. This feature frees up highly coveted space in an increasingly wireless world -- especially a post-Sept. 11

world in which intelligence communities and emergency responders need more airwave space to operate.

Congress enacted the original plan to switch to digital, the Digital TV Transition and Public Safety Act, on Oct. 20, 2005. It mandated that all broadcasters stop emitting an analog signal by Feb. 17, 2009.

Some locations in the U.S. have already switched to digital. "We haven't seen any truly horrible problems in television markets that have already turned off their analog, such as Hawaii," Powers said. "This is good news." **-Paul Steven Ghiringhelli**